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MODERN INFIDELITY CONSIDERED

WITH RESPECT TO ITS

INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY:

IN A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE BAPTIST MEETING,

CAMBRIDGE.

By ROBERT HALL, A. M.

Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe they became fools. ST. PAUL.

Sunt qui in fortunæ jam caſibus omnia ponant,
Et nullo credant mundum rectore moveri,
Natura volvente vices et lucis, et anni;
Atque ideo intrepidi quæcunque altaria tangunt. JUV.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE THIRD ENGLISH EDITION.

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PREFACE.

THE Author knows not whether it be neceſſary to apologize for the extraordinary length of this ſermon, which ſo much exceeds the uſual limits of public diſcourſes; for it is only for the reader to conceive, (by a fiction of the imagination, if he pleaſes ſo to conſider it) that the patience of his audience indulged him with their attention during its delivery. The fact is, not being in the habit of writing his ſermons, this diſcourſe was not committed to paper till after it was delivered; ſo that the phraſeology may probably vary, and the bulk be ſomewhat extended; but the ſubſtance is certainly retained.

He muſt crave the indulgence of the religious public for having blended ſo little *theology* with it. He is fully aware, the chief attention of a chriſtian miniſter ſhould be occupied in explaining the doctrines, and enforcing the duties, of genuine chriſtianity; nor is he chargeable, he hopes, in the exerciſe of his public functions, with any remarkable deviation from that rule of conduct; yet is he equally convinced, excurſions into other topics are ſometimes both lawful and neceſſary. The verſatility of error demands a correſpondent variety in the methods of defending truth: and from whom have the public more right to expect its defence, in oppoſition to the encroachments of error and infidelity, than from thoſe who profeſs to devote their ſtudies and their lives to the advancement of virtue and religion? Accordingly, a multitude of publications on theſe ſubjects, equally powerful in argument, and impreſſive in manner, have iſſued from divines of different perſuaſions, which muſt be allowed to have done the utmoſt honor to the clerical profeſſion. The moſt luminous ſtatements of the evidences of Chriſtianity, on hiſtorical grounds, have been made; the petulant cavils of Infidels ſatisfactorily refuted; and their ignorance, if not put to ſhame, at leaſt amply expoſed; ſo that revelation, as far as truth and reaſon can prevail, is on all ſides triumphant.

There is one point of view, however, in which the reſpective ſyſtems remain to be examined, which, though hitherto little conſidered, is forced upon our attention by the preſent conduct of our adverſaries; that is, their *Influence on Society*. The controverſy appears to have taken a new turn. The advocates of Infidelity, baffled in the field of argument, though unwilling to relinquiſh the conteſt, have changed their mode of attack, and ſeem leſs diſpoſed to impugn the authority than to ſuperſede the uſe of Revealed Religion, by giving ſuch repreſentations of man and of ſociety as are calculated to make its ſanctions appear unreaſonable and unneceſſary. Their aim is not ſo much to diſcredit the pretenſions of any particular religion, as to ſet aſide the principles common to all.

To obliterate the ſenſe of Deity, of moral ſanctions, and a future world, and by theſe means to prepare the way for the total ſubverſion of every inſtitution, both ſocial and religious, which men have been hitherto accuſtomed to revere, is evidently the principal object of modern Sceptics; the firſt ſophiſts who have avowed an attempt to govern the world without inculcating the perſuaſion of a ſuperior power. It might well excite our ſurpriſe, to behold an effort to ſhake off the yoke of religion, which was totally unknown during the prevalence of groſs ſuperſtition, reſerved for a period of the world diſtinguiſhed from every other by the poſſeſſion of a Revelation more pure, perfect, and better authenticated, than the enlightened ſages of antiquity ever ventured to anticipate, were we not fully perſuaded the immaculate holineſs of this Revelation is preciſely that which renders it diſguſting to men who are determined at all events to retain their vices. Our Saviour furniſhes the ſolution; *they love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil; neither will they come to the light leſt their deeds ſhould be reproved.*

While all the religions, the Jewiſh excepted, which, previous to the promulgation of chriſtianity, prevailed in the world, partly the contrivance of human policy, partly the offspring of ignorant fear, mixed with the mutilated remains of traditionary revelation, were favorable to the indulgence of ſome vices, and but feebly reſtrained the practice of others; betwixt vice of every

ſort and in every degree, and the religion of Jeſus, there ſubſiſts an irreconcileable enmity, an eternal diſcord. The dominion of chriſtianity being, in the very eſſence of it, the dominion of virtue, we need look no farther for the ſources of hoſtility in any who oppoſe it, than their attachment to vice and diſorder.

This view of the controverſy, if it be juſt, demonſtrates its ſupreme importance, and furniſhes the ſtrongeſt plea with every one with whom it is not a matter of indifference whether vice or virtue, deluſion or truth, govern the world, to exert his talents in whatever proportion they are poſſeſſed, in *contending earneſtly for the faith once delivered to the ſaints*. In ſuch a criſis, is it not beſt for Chriſtians of all denominations, that they may better concentrate their forces againſt the common adverſary, to ſuſpend, for the preſent, their internal diſputes, imitating the policy of wiſe ſtates, who have never failed to conſider the invaſion of an enemy as the ſignal for terminating the conteſts of party? Internal peace is the beſt fruit we can reap from external danger. The momentous conteſt at iſſue betwixt the chriſtian church and infidels, may inſtruct us how trivial, for the moſt part, are the controverſies of its members with each other, and that the different ceremonies, opinions and practices, by which they are diſtinguiſhed, correſpond to the variety of feature and complexion, diſcernible in the offspring of the ſame parent, among whom there ſubſiſts the greateſt family likeneſs. May it pleaſe God ſo to diſpoſe the minds of chriſtians of every viſible church and community, *that Ephraim no longer vexing Judah, nor Judah Ephraim*, the only rivalry felt in future may be, who ſhall moſt advance the intereſts of our common chriſtianity, and the only provocation ſuſtained, *that of provoking each other to love and good works!*—When, at the diſtance of more than half a century, chriſtianity was aſſaulted, by a *Woolſton*, a *Tindal*, and a *Morgan*, it was ably ſupported, both by clergymen of the eſtabliſhed church, and writers among proteſtant diſſenters; the labors of a *Clarke* and a *Butler*, were aſſociated with thoſe of a *Doddridge*, a *Leland*, and a *Lardner*, with ſuch equal reputation and ſucceſs, as to make it evident that the intrinſic excellence of religion needs not the aid of external appendages; but that, with or

without a dowry, her charms are of ſufficient power to fix and engage the heart.

The writer of this diſcourſe will feel himſelf happy, ſhould his example ſtimulate any of his brethren, of ſuperior abilities, to contribute their exertions in ſo good a cauſe. His apology for not entering more at large, into the proofs of the being of a God,* and the evidences of Chriſtianity,† is, that theſe ſubjects have been already handled with great ability by various writers, and that he wiſhed rather to confine himſelf to one view of the ſubject, the total incompatibility of ſceptical principles with the exiſtence of ſociety. Should his life be ſpared, he may probably, at ſome future time, enter into a fuller and more particular examination of the infidel philoſophy, both with reſpect to its ſpeculative principles, and its practical effects; its influence on ſociety and on the individual. In the mean time, he humbly conſecrates this diſcourſe to the honor of that Saviour, who, when the means of a more liberal offering are wanting, commends the widow's mite.

Cambridge, January 18, 1800.

P. S. The author has availed himſelf of the opportunity afforded by a new impreſſion, to correct ſome errors which had crept unawares into the firſt edition, as well as to make a few other alterations too trivial to be ſpecified.

* See an excellent ſermon on atheiſm, by the Rev. Mr. *Eſtlin*, of *Briſtol*, at whoſe meeting the ſubſtance of this diſcourſe was firſt preached. In the ſermon referred to, the argument for the exiſtence of a Deity, is ſtated with the utmoſt clearneſs and preciſion, and the ſophiſtry of *Dupuis*, a French infidel, refuted in a very ſatisfactory manner.

† It is almoſt ſuperfluous to name a work ſo univerſally known as Dr. *Paley's View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity*, which is, probably, without exception, the moſt clear and ſatisfactory ſtatement of the hiſtorical proofs of the chriſtian religion, ever exhibited in any age or country.

A

SERMON,

ON

EPHESIANS ii. 12.——*WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.*

AS the chriſtian miniſtry is eſtabliſhed for the inſtruction of men, throughout every age, in truth and holineſs, it muſt adapt itſelf to the ever ſhifting ſcenes of the moral world, and ſtand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, under whatever form they may appear. The church and the world form two ſocieties ſo diſtinct, and governed by ſuch oppoſite principles and maxims, that, as well from this contrariety as from the expreſs warnings of ſcripture, true chriſtians muſt look for a ſtate of warfare, with this conſoling aſſurance, that the church, like the burning buſh beheld by Moſes in the land of Midian, may be encompaſſed with flames, but will never be conſumed.

When ſhe was delivered from the perſecuting power of Rome, ſhe only experienced a change of trials. The oppreſſion of external violence was followed by the more dangerous and inſidious attacks of internal enemies. The freedom of inquiry claimed and aſſerted at the reformation, degenerated in the hands of men who profeſſed the principles without poſſeſſing the ſpirit of the reformers, into a fondneſs for ſpeculative refinements, and conſequently into a ſource of diſpute, faction, and hereſy. While proteſtants attended more to the points on which they differed, than to thoſe in which they agreed, while more zeal was employed in ſettling cere-

monies and defending ſubtleties, than in enforcing plain revealed truths, the lovely fruits of peace and charity periſhed under the ſtorms of controverſy.

In this disjointed and diſordered ſtate of the chriſtian church, they who never looked into the interior of chriſtianity, were apt to ſuſpect, that to a ſubject ſo fruitful in particular diſputes, muſt attach a general uncertainty, and that a religion founded on revelation, could never have occaſioned ſuch diſcordancy of principle and practice amongſt its diſciples. Thus infidelity is the joint offspring of an irreligious temper and unholy ſpeculation, employed, not in examining the evidences of chriſtianity, but in detecting the vices and imperfections of profeſſing chriſtians. It has paſſed through various ſtages, each diſtinguiſhed by higher gradations of impiety ; for when men arrogantly abandon their guide, and wilfully ſhut their eyes on the light of heaven, it is wiſely ordained that their errors ſhall multiply at every ſtep, until their extravagance confutes itſelf, and the miſchief of their principles works its own antidote. That ſuch has been the progreſs of infidelity will be obvious from a ſlight ſurvey of its hiſtory.

Lord *Herbert*, the firſt and pureſt of our Engliſh free thinkers, who flouriſhed in the beginning of the reign of Charles the firſt, did not ſo much impugn the doctrine or the morality of the ſcriptures, as attempt to ſuperſede their neceſſity, by endeavoring to ſhew, that the great principles of the unity of God, a moral government, and a future world, are taught with ſufficient clearneſs by the light of nature. *Bolingbroke*, and others of his ſucceſſors advanced much farther, and attempted to invalidate the proofs of the moral character of the Deity, and conſequently all expectations of rewards and puniſhments, leaving the Supreme Being no other perfections than thoſe which belong to a firſt cauſe or almighty contriver. After him, at a conſiderable diſtance, followed *Hume*, the moſt ſubtle, if not the moſt philoſophical of the deiſts, who,

by perplexing the relations of cauſe and effect, boldly aimed to introduce an univerſal ſcepticiſm, and to pour a more than Egyptian darkneſs into the whole region of morals. Since his time, ſceptical writers have ſprung up in abundance, and infidelity has allured multitudes to its ſtandard; the young and ſuperficial by its dexterous ſophiſtry, the vain by the literary fame of its champions, and the profligate by the licentiouſneſs of its principles. Atheiſm, the moſt undiſguiſed, has at length begun to make its appearance.

Animated by numbers and emboldened by ſucceſs, the infidels of the preſent day have given a new direction to their efforts, and impreſſed a new character on the ever growing maſs of their impious ſpeculations.

By uniting more cloſely with each other, by giving a ſprinkling of irreligion to all their literary productions, they aim to engroſs the formation of the public mind, and, amidſt the warmeſt profeſſions of attachment to virtue, to effect an entire diſruption of morality from religion. Pretending to be the teachers of virtue and the guides of life, they propoſe to revolutionize the morals of mankind, to regenerate the world by a proceſs entirely new, and to rear the temple of virtue, not merely without the aid of religion, but on the renunciation of its principles and the deriſion of its ſanctions. Their party has derived a great acceſſion of numbers and ſtrength, from events the moſt momentous and aſtoniſhing in the political world, which have divided the ſentiments of Europe betwixt hope and terror, and, however they may iſſue, have, for the preſent, ſwelled the ranks of infidelity. So rapidly, indeed, has it advanced ſince this criſis, that a great majority on the continent, and in England a conſiderable proportion, of thoſe who purſue literature as a profeſſion,* may juſtly be conſidered as the open or diſguiſed abettors of atheiſm.

* By thoſe who purſue literature as a profeſſion, the Author would be underſtood to mean that numerous claſs of literary men, who draw their principal ſubſiſtence from their writings.

With reſpect to the ſceptical and religious ſyſtems, the inquiry at preſent is not ſo much which is the trueſt in ſpeculation, as which is the moſt uſeful in practice ; or in other words, whether morality will be beſt promoted, by conſidering it as part of a great and comprehenſive law, emanating from the will of a ſupreme, omnipotent Legiſlator ; or as a mere expedient adapted to our preſent ſituation, enforced by no other motives than thoſe which ariſe from the proſpects and intereſts of the preſent ſtate. The *abſurdity* of atheiſm having been demonſtrated ſo often and ſo clearly by many eminent men, that this part of the ſubject is exhauſted, I ſhould haſten immediately to what I have more particularly in view, were I not apprehenſive a diſcourſe of this kind may be expected to contain ſome ſtatement of the argument in proof of a Deity, which, therefore, I ſhall preſent in as few and plain words as poſſible.

When we examine a watch, or any other piece of machinery, we inſtantly perceive marks of deſign. The arrangement of its ſeveral parts and the adaption of its movements to one reſult, ſhew it to be a contrivance ; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itſelf, but in a ſeparate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vaſt magazine of contrivances, we ſee innumerable objects replete with the moſt exquiſite deſign. The human eye, for example, is formed, with admirable ſkill for the purpoſe of ſight ; the ear for the function of hearing. As in the productions of art, we never think of aſcribing the power of contrivance to the machine itſelf, ſo we are certain the ſkill diſplayed in the human ſtructure, is not a property of man, ſince he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inſeparable relation betwixt the ideas of a contrivance and a contriver, and it be evident in regard to the human ſtructure the deſigning agent is not man himſelf, there muſt undeniably be ſome ſeparate inviſible

Being who is his former. This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.

This reaſoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be ſaid, may we not ſuppoſe the world has always continued as it is ; that is, that there has been a conſtant ſucceſſion of finite beings, appearing and diſappearing on the earth from all eternity ? I anſwer, whatever is ſuppoſed to have occaſioned this conſtant ſucceſſion, excluſive of an intelligent cauſe, will never account for the undeniable marks of deſign, viſible in all finite beings ; nor is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing a contrivance without a contriver diminiſhed by this imaginary ſucceſſion, but rather increaſed by being repeated at every ſtep of the ſeries.

Beſides, an eternal ſucceſſion of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is, therefore, plainly impoſſible. As the ſuppoſition is made to get quit of the idea of any one having exiſted from eternity, each of the beings in the ſucceſſion muſt have begun in time ; but the ſucceſſion itſelf is eternal. We have then, a ſucceſſion of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the ſucceſſion ; or, in other words, a ſeries of beings running on *ad infinitum*, before it reached any particular beginning ; which is abſurd.

From theſe conſiderations, it is manifeſt there muſt be ſome eternal being, or nothing could ever have exiſted ; and ſince the beings which we behold, bear in their whole ſtructure evident marks of wiſdom and deſign, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wiſe and intelligent Agent.

To prove the unity of this great Being, in oppoſition to a plurality of gods, it is not neceſſary to have recourſe to metaphyſical abſtractions : it is ſufficient to obſerve that the notion of more than one Author of nature is inconſiſtent with that harmony of deſign which pervades her works, that it ſolves no appearances, is ſupported by no evidence, and ſerves no purpoſe but to embarraſs and perplex our conceptions.

Such are the proofs of the exiſtence of that great and glorious Being whom we denominate God: and it is not preſumption to ſay, it is impoſſible to find another truth in the whole compaſs of morals, which according to the juſteſt laws of reaſoning, admits of ſuch ſtrict and rigorous demonſtration.

But I proceed to the more immediate object of this diſcourſe, which, as has been already intimated, is not ſo much to evince the falſehood of ſcepticiſm as a theory, as to diſplay its miſchievous effects, contraſted with thoſe which reſult from the belief of a Deity and a future ſtate. The ſubject viewed in this light, may be conſidered under two aſpects; the influence of the oppoſite ſyſtems on the principle of morals, and on the formation of character; the firſt may be ſtiled their direct, the latter, their equally important, but indirect conſequence and tendency.

I. The ſceptical or irreligious ſyſtem ſubverts the whole foundation of morals. It may be affirmed as a maxim, that no perſon can be required to act contrary to his greateſt good, or his higheſt intereſt, comprehenſively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to forego our own intereſt *partially*; to ſacrifice a ſmaller pleaſure for the ſake of a greater; to incur a preſent evil in purſuit of a diſtant good of more conſequence; in a word, to arbitrate, amongſt interfering claims of inclination, is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to riſque the happineſs of the whole duration of our being in any caſe whatever, admitting it to be poſſible, would be fooliſh, becauſe the ſacrifice muſt, by the nature of it, be ſo great as to preclude the poſſibility of compenſation.

As the preſent world upon ſceptical principles, is the only place of recompence, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promiſe the greateſt ſum of preſent good, caſes which often occur in reality, and much oftener in appearance, every motive to virtuous conduct is ſuperſeded, a deviation from

rectitude becomes the part of wiſdom; and ſhould the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obſtructed by diſgrace, torment or death, to perſevere would be madneſs and folly, and a violation of the firſt and moſt eſſential law of nature. Virtue on theſe principles, being in numberleſs inſtances, at war with ſelf preſervation, never can or ought to become a fixed habit on the mind.

The ſyſtem of infidelity is not only incapable of arming virtue for great and trying occaſions; but leaves it unſupported in the moſt ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral ſenſe, to benevolence and ſympathy; in vain will they expatiate on the tranquillity and pleaſure attendant on a virtuous courſe; for it is undeniable that theſe impulſes may be overcome, and though you may remind the offender, that in diſregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct conſiſtent with them is productive of much internal ſatisfaction; yet, if he reply that his taſte is of a different ſort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man muſt chooſe his own pleaſures, the argument is at an end.

Rewards and puniſhments awarded by Omnipotent Power, afford a palpable and preſſing motive, which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature; but taſtes and reliſhes are not to be preſcribed.

A motive in which the reaſon of man ſhall acquieſce, enforcing the practice of virtue, at all times and ſeaſons, enters into the very eſſence of moral obligation; modern infidelity ſupplies no ſuch motive; it is, therefore, eſſentially and infallibly a ſyſtem of enervation, turpitude and vice.

This chaſm in the conſtruction of morals, can only be ſupplied by the firm belief of a rewarding and avenging Deity, who binds duty and happineſs, though they may ſeem diſtant, in an indiſſoluble chain, without which, whatever uſurps the name of virtue, is not a principle, but a feeling, not a determinate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the taſtes of individuals, and changing with the ſcenes of life.

Nor is this the only way in which infidelity ſubverts the foundation of morals. All reaſoning on morals, pre-ſuppoſes a diſtinction betwixt inclinations and duties, affections and rules : the former prompt, the latter preſcribe ; the former ſupply motives to action, the latter regulate and control it. Hence, it is evident, if virtue has any juſt claim to authority, it muſt be under the latter of theſe notions, that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and ſupreme.

But without the intervention of a ſuperior will, it is impoſſible there ſhould be any moral laws, except in the lax, metaphorical ſenſe, in which we ſpeak of the laws of matter and motion : men being eſſentially equal, morality is, on theſe principles, only a ſtipulation or ſilent compact, into which every man is ſuppoſed to enter, as far as ſuits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal and his judge.

Two conſequences, the moſt diſaſtrous to ſociety, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this ſyſtem ; the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total abſence of great virtues.

1. In thoſe conjunctures which tempt avarice or inflame ambition, when a crime flatters with the proſpect of impunity, and the certainty of immenſe advantage, what is to reſtrain an atheiſt from its commiſſion ? To ſay that remorſe will deter him, is abſurd ; for remorſe as diſtinguiſhed from pity, is the ſole offspring of religious belief, the extinction of which is the great purpoſe of the infidel philoſophy.

The dread of puniſhment or infamy from his fellow creatures, will be an equally ineffectual barrier, becauſe crimes are only committed under ſuch circumſtances as ſuggeſt the hope of concealment ; not to ſay that crimes themſelves will ſoon loſe

their infamy and their horror, under the influence of that ſyſtem which deſtroys the ſanctity of virtue, by converting it into a low calculation of worldly intereſt. Here the ſenſe of an ever preſent Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the moſt awful and indiſpenſible neceſſity, as it is that alone which impreſſes on all crimes the character of folly, ſhews that duty and intereſt in every inſtance coincide, and that the moſt proſperous career of vice, the moſt brilliant ſucceſſes of criminality, are but an *accumulation of wrath, againſt the day of wrath.*

As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable conſequence of the diffuſion of ſceptical principles, ſo to underſtand this conſequence in its full extent, we muſt look beyond their immediate effects, and conſider the diſruption of ſocial ties, the deſtruction of confidence, the terror, ſuſpicion and hatred, which muſt prevail in that ſtate of ſociety in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquillity which pervades a well ordered community, and the mutual good offices which bind its members together, is founded on the implied confidence in the indiſpoſition to annoy, in the juſtice, humanity and moderation of thoſe among whom we dwell; ſo that the worſt conſequence of crimes is, that they impair the ſtock of public charity and general tenderneſs. The dread and hatred of our ſpecies would infallibly be grafted on a conviction that we were expoſed, every moment to the ſurges of an unbridled ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magiſtrate ſtood between us and the daggers of aſſaſſins. In ſuch a ſtate, laws deriving no ſupport from public manners, are unequal to the taſk of curbing the fury of the paſſions, which from being concentrated into ſelfiſhneſs, fear and revenge, acquire new force; terror and ſuſpicion beget cruelty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention; pity is extinguiſhed in the ſtronger impulſe of ſelf preſervation; the tender and generous affections are cruſhed, and nothing is ſeen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce

and unmitigated ſtruggle for ſuperiority. This is but a faint ſketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we muſt expect, ſhould we be ſo unfortunate as ever to witneſs the triumph of modern infidelity.

2. This ſyſtem is a ſoil as barren of great and ſublime virtues, as it is prolific in crimes. By great and ſublime virtues are meant, thoſe which are called into action on great and trying occaſions, which demand the ſacrifice of the deareſt intereſts and proſpects of human life, and ſometimes of life itſelf; the virtues, in a word, which by their rarity and ſplendor draw admiration, and have rendered illuſtrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confeſſors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of exiſtence within the preſent life, muſt tend, in a proportionable degree, to diminiſh the grandeur and narrow the ſphere of human agency.

As well might you expect exalted ſentiments of juſtice from a profeſſed gameſter, as look for noble principles in the man whoſe hopes and fears are all ſuſpended on the preſent moment, and who ſtakes the whole happineſs of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he is ever impelled to the performance of great achievements in a good cauſe, it muſt be ſolely by the hope of fame; a motive which, beſides that it makes virtue the ſervant of opinion, uſually grows weaker at the approach of death, and which, however it may ſurmount the love of exiſtence, in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public obſervation, can ſeldom be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private ſtation.

In affirming that infidelity is unfavorable to the higher claſs of virtues we are ſupported as well by facts, as by reaſoning. We ſhould be ſorry to load our adverſaries with unmerited reproach; but to what hiſtory, to what record, will they appeal, for the traits of moral greatneſs, exhibited by

their diſciples? Where ſhall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity, or atheiſtical virtue? Not that we mean to accuſe them of inactivity: they have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits; exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperiſhable memory and diſaſtrous luſtre.

Though it is confeſſed great and ſplendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but muſt, from their nature, be reſerved for high and eminent occaſions, yet, that ſyſtem is eſſentially defective which leaves no room for their cultivation. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often ſave and always illuſtrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raiſe the ſtandard of morals; they arreſt the progreſs of degeneracy; they diffuſe a luſtre over the path of life: monuments of the greatneſs of the human ſoul, they preſent to the world the auguſt image of virtue in her ſublimeſt form, from which ſtreams of light and glory iſſue to remote times and ages: while their commemoration, by the pen of hiſtorians and poets, awakens in diſtant boſoms the ſparks of kindred excellence.

Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds, with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of ſociety, which completes the degradation of the ſpecies; the frightful contraſt of dwarfiſh virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing good is mean and little, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant; a dead and ſickening uniformity prevails, broken only at intervals by volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

II. Hitherto we have conſidered the influence of ſcepticiſm on the principles of virtue; and have endeavored to ſhew that it deſpoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the duſt: its influence on the formation of character remains to

be examined. The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their intereſt : their conduct takes its color more from their acquired taſte, inclinations, and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greateſt good. It is only on great occaſions the mind awakes, to take an extended ſurvey of her whole courſe, and that ſhe ſuffers the dictates of reaſon to impreſs a new bias upon her movements ; the actions of each day, are for the moſt part, links which follow each other in the chain of cuſtom. Hence the great effort of practical wiſdom is to imbue the mind with right taſtes, affections and habits ; the elements of character, and maſters of action.

The excluſion of a ſupreme Being and of a ſuperintending Providence, tends directly to the deſtruction of moral taſte. It robs the univerſe of all finiſhed and conſummate excellence, even in idea. The admiration of perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, for which we are formed, and which kindles ſuch unſpeakable rapture in the ſoul, finding in the regions of ſcepticiſm nothing to which it correſponds, droops and languiſhes. In a world which preſents a fair ſpectacle of order and beauty, of a vaſt family nouriſhed and ſupported by an almighty Parent, in a world which leads the devout mind ſtep by ſtep, to the contemplation of the firſt fair and the firſt good, the ſceptic is encompaſſed with nothing but obſcurity, meanneſs and diſorder.

When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we muſt be convinced that ſuch an idea, intimately preſent to the mind, muſt have a moſt powerful effect in refining the moral taſte. Compoſed of the richeſt elements, it embraces, in the character of a beneficent Parent, and almighty Ruler, whatever is venerable in wiſdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodneſs.

Human excellence is blended with many imperfections, and ſeen under many limitations ; it is beheld only in detached

and ſeparate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire; ſo that, when, in imitation of the ſtoics, we wiſh to form out of theſe fragments the notion of a perfectly wiſe and good man, we know it is a mere fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is embodied and realized. In the belief of a Deity theſe conceptions are reduced to reality: the ſcattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentrated, and become the real attributes of that Being with whom we ſtand in the neareſt relation, who ſits ſupreme at the head of the univerſe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his preſence.

The efficacy of theſe ſentiments in producing and augmenting a virtuous taſte, will indeed be proportioned to the vividneſs with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur; yet ſome benefit will not fail to reſult from them, even in their loweſt degree.

The idea of the ſupreme Being, has this peculiar property, that as it admits of no ſubſtitute, ſo from the firſt moment it is impreſſed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himſelf is immutable; but our conception of his character is continually receiving freſh acceſſions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having transferred upon it new perceptions of beauty and goodneſs, by attracting to itſelf, as a centre, whatever bears the impreſs of dignity, order or happineſs. It borrows ſplendor from all that is fair, ſubordinates to itſelf all that is great, and ſits enthroned on the riches of the univerſe.

As the object of worſhip will always be the object of imitation, hence ariſes a fixed ſtandard of moral excellence, by the contemplation of which, the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature riſes above its natural level.

When the knowledge of God was loſt in the world, juſt ideas of virtue and moral obligation diſappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwiſe accounted for, that in the poliſhed nations, and in the enlightened times of pagan antiquity, the moſt unnatural luſts and deteſtable impurities were not only tolerated in private life,* but entered into religion, and formed a material part of public worſhip;† while among the Jews, a people ſo much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the ſame vices were regarded with horror?

The reaſon is this; the true character of God was unknown to the former, which, by the light of divine revelation, was imparted to the latter. The former caſt their deities in the mould of their own imaginations, in conſequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worſhippers: to the latter, no ſcope was left for the wanderings of fancy, but a pure and perfect model was preſcribed.

Falſe and corrupt, however, as was the religion of the pagans (if it deſerve the name) and defective, and often vicious, as was the character of their imaginary deities, it was ſtill better for the world, for the void of knowledge to be filled with theſe, than abandoned to a total ſcepticiſm; for if both ſyſtems are equally falſe, they are not equally pernicious. When the fictions of heatheniſm conſecrated the memory of its le-

* It is worthy of obſervation, that the elegant and philoſophic *Xenophon*, in delineating the model of a perfect Prince in the character of Cyrus, introduces a Mede who had formed an unnatural paſſion for his hero, and relates the incident in a lively, feſtive humor, without being in the leaſt conſcious of any indelicacy attached to it. What muſt be the ſtate of manners in a country where a circumſtance of this kind, feigned, no doubt, by way of ornament, finds a place in ſuch a work? *Cyri Inſtit. Lib.* 1.

Deinde nobis qui *concedentibus philoſophis antiquis*, adoleſcentulis delectamur etiam vitia ſæpe jucunda ſunt. *Cicero De Nat. Dei. Lib.* 1.

† —— *Nam quo non proſtat fœmina templo.* Juv.

The impurities practiſed in the worſhip of Iſis, an Egyptian deity, roſe to ſuch a height, in the reign of *Tiberius*, that that proſligate prince thought fit to prohibit her worſhip, and at the ſame time inflicted on her prieſts the puniſhment of crucifixion. *Joſeph. Antiquit. Judaic. L.* 18.

giſlators and heroes, it inveſted them for the moſt part with thoſe qualities which were in the greateſt repute. They were ſuppoſed to poſſeſs in the higheſt degree the virtues in which it was moſt honorable to excel, and to be the witneſſes, approvers and patrons of thoſe perfections in others, by which their own character was chiefly diſtinguiſhed. Men ſaw, or rather fancied they ſaw, in theſe ſuppoſed deities, the qualities they moſt admired dilated to a larger ſize, moving in a higher ſphere, and aſſociated with the power, dignity and happineſs of ſuperior natures. With ſuch ideal models before them, and conceiving themſelves continually acting under the eye of ſuch ſpectators and judges, they felt a real elevation : their eloquence became more impaſſioned, their patriotiſm inflamed, and their courage exalted.

Revelation, by diſplaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect ſtandard of virtue ; heatheniſm, one in many reſpects defective and vicious ; the faſhionable ſcepticiſm of the preſent day, which excludes the belief of all ſuperior powers, affords no ſtandard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itſelf. All above and around it being ſhrouded in darkneſs, and the proſpect confined to the tame realities of life, virtue has no room upwards to expand, nor are any excurſions permitted into that unſeen world, the true element of the great and good, by which it is fortified with motives equally calculated to ſatisfy the reaſon, to delight the fancy, and to impreſs the heart.

Modern infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taſte ; it alſo promotes the growth of thoſe vices which are the moſt hoſtile to ſocial happineſs. Of all the vices incident to human nature, the moſt deſtructive to ſociety are vanity, ferocity, and unbridled ſenſuality ; and theſe are preciſely the vices which infidelity is calculated to cheriſh.

That the love, fear, and habitual contemplation of a Being infinitely exalted, or in other words, devotion, is adapted to

promote a ſober and moderate eſtimate of our own excellencies, is inconteſtible ; nor is it leſs evident, that the excluſion of ſuch ſentiments muſt be favorable to pride. The criminality of pride will, perhaps, be leſs readily admitted ; for though there is no vice ſo oppoſite to the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, yet there is none which, even in the Chriſtian world, has, under various pretences, been treated with ſo much indulgence.

There is, it will be confeſſed, a delicate ſenſibility to character, a ſober deſire of reputation, a wiſh to poſſeſs the eſteem of the wiſe and good, felt by the pureſt minds, and which is at the fartheſt remove from arrogance or vanity. The humility of a noble mind ſcarcely dares to approve of itſelf, until it has ſecured the approbation of others. Very different is that reſtleſs deſire of diſtinction, that paſſion for theatrical diſplay, which inflames the heart and occupies the whole attention of vain men. This, of all the paſſions, is the moſt unſocial, avarice itſelf not excepted. The reaſon is plain. Property is a kind of good, which may be more eaſily attained, and is capable of more minute ſub-diviſions, than fame. In the purſuit of wealth, men are led by an attention to their own intereſt to promote the welfare of each other ; their advantages are reciprocal ; the benefits which each is anxious to acquire for himſelf, he reaps in the greateſt abundance from the union and conjunction of ſociety. The purſuits of vanity are quite contrary. The portion of time and attention mankind are willing to ſpare from their avocations and pleaſures, to devote to the admiration of each other is ſo ſmall, that every ſucceſsful adventurer is felt to have impaired the common ſtock. The ſucceſs of one is the diſappointment of multitudes. For though there be many rich, many virtuous, many wiſe men, fame muſt neceſſarily be the portion of but few. Hence every vain man, every man in whom vanity is the ruling paſſion, regarding his rival as his enemy, is ſtrongly tempted to rejoice in his miſcarriage and repine at his ſucceſs.

Beſides, as the paſſions are ſeldom ſeen in a ſimple, unmixed ſtate, ſo vanity, when it ſucceeds, degenerates into arrogance; when it is diſappointed (and it is often diſappointed) it is exaſperated into malignity and corrupted into envy. In this ſtage the vain man commences a determined miſanthropiſt. He deteſts that excellence which he cannot reach. He deteſts his ſpecies, and longs to be revenged for the unpardonable injuſtice he has ſuſtained in their inſenſibility to his merits. He lives upon the calamities of the world; the vices and miſeries of men are his element and his food. Virtue, talents, and genius are his natural enemies, which he perſecutes with inſtinctive eagerneſs, and unrelenting hoſtility. There are who doubt the exiſtence of ſuch a diſpoſition; but it certainly iſſues out of the dregs of diſappointed vanity: a diſeaſe which taints and vitiates the whole character where ever it prevails. It forms the heart to ſuch a profound indifference to the welfare of others, that whatever appearances he may aſſume, or however wide the circle of his ſeeming virtues may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man is his own centre. Attentive only to himſelf, abſorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, inſtead of feeling tenderneſs for his fellow creatures as members of the ſame family, as beings with whom he is appointed to act, to ſuffer, and to ſympathize; he conſiders life as a ſtage on which he is performing a part, and mankind in no other light than ſpectators. Whether he ſmiles or frowns, whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence or his ſteps are died in blood, an attention to ſelf is the ſpring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred.

His apparent good qualities loſe all their worth, by loſing all that is ſimple, genuine and natural: they are even preſſed into the ſervice of vanity, and become the means of enlarging its power. The truly good man is jealous over himſelf, leſt the notoriety of his beſt actions by blending itſelf with

their motive, ſhould diminiſh their value ; the vain man performs the ſame actions for the ſake of that notoriety. The good man quietly diſcharges his duty and ſhuns oſtentation ; the vain man conſiders every good deed loſt that is not publicly diſplayed. The one is intent upon realities, the other upon ſemblances : the one aims to *be* virtuous, the other to *appear* ſo.

Nor is a mind inflated with vanity more diſqualified for right action than juſt ſpeculation ; or better diſpoſed to the purſuit of truth than the practice of virtue. To ſuch a mind the ſimplicity of truth is diſguſting. Careleſs of the improvement of mankind, and intent only upon aſtoniſhing with the appearance of novelty, the glare of paradox will be preferred to the light of truth ; opinions will be embraced, not becauſe they are juſt, but becauſe they are new : the more flagitious, the more ſubverſive of morals, the more alarming to the wiſe and good, the more welcome to men who eſtimate their literary powers by the miſchief they produce, and who conſider the anxiety and terror they impreſs as the meaſure of their renown. Truth is ſimple and uniform, while error may be infinitely varied ; and as it is one thing to ſtart paradoxes, and another to make diſcoveries, we need the leſs wonder at the prodigious increaſe of modern philoſophers.

We have been ſo much accuſtomed to conſider extravagant ſelf eſtimation merely as a *ridiculous* quality, that many will be ſurpriſed to find it treated as a vice, pregnant with ſerious miſchief to ſociety. But, to form a judgment of its influence upon the manners and happineſs of a nation, it is neceſſary only to look at its effects in a family ; for bodies of men are only collections of individuals, and the greateſt nation is nothing more than an aggregate of a number of families. Conceive of a domeſtic circle, in which each member is elated with a moſt extravagant opinion of himſelf, and a proportionable contempt of every other, is full of little contrivances

to catch applauſe, and whenever he is not praiſed is ſullen and diſappointed; what a picture of diſunion, diſguſt, and animoſity would ſuch a family preſent; how utterly would domeſtic affection be extinguiſhed, and all the purpoſes of domeſtic ſociety be defeated! The general prevalence of ſuch diſpoſitions muſt be accompanied by an equal proportion of general miſery. The tendency of pride to produce ſtrife and hatred, is ſufficiently apparent from the pains men have been at to conſtruct a ſyſtem of politeneſs, which is nothing more than a ſort of mimic humility, in which the ſentiments of an offenſive ſelf eſtimation are ſo far diſguiſed and ſuppreſſed, as to make them compatible with the ſpirit of ſociety; ſuch a mode of behavior as would naturally reſult from an attention to the apoſtolic injunction: *Let nothing be done through ſtrife or vain glory: but in lowlineſs of mind, let each eſteem other better than themſelves.* But if the ſemblance is of ſuch importance, how much more uſeful the reality: if the mere garb of humility is of ſuch indiſpenſible neceſſity, that without it ſociety could not ſubſiſt, how much better ſtill would the harmony of the world be preſerved, were the condeſcention, deference, and reſpect, ſo ſtudiouſly diſplayed, a true picture of the heart?

The ſame reſtleſs and eager vanity which diſturbs a family, when it is permitted in a great national criſis to mingle with political affairs, diſtracts a kingdom; infuſing into thoſe entruſted with the enaction of laws, a ſpirit of raſh innovation and daring empiriciſm, a diſdain of the eſtabliſhed uſages of mankind, a fooliſh deſire to dazzle the world with new and untried ſyſtems of policy, in which the precedents of antiquity and the experience of ages are only conſulted to be trodden under foot; and into the executive department of government, a fierce contention for pre-eminence, an inceſſant

ſtruggle to ſupplant and deſtroy, with a propenſity to calumny and ſuſpicion, proſcription, and maſſacre.

We ſhall ſuffer the moſt eventful ſeaſon ever witneſſed in the affairs of men to paſs over our heads to very little purpoſe, if we fail to learn from it ſome awful leſſons on the nature and progreſs of the paſſions. The true light in which the French revolution ought to be contemplated, is that of a grand experiment on human nature. Among the various paſſions which that revolution has ſo ſtrikingly diſplayed, none is more conſpicuous than vanity; or is it difficult, without adverting to the national character of the people, to account for its extraordinary predominence. Political power, the moſt ſeducing object of ambition, never before circulated through ſo many hands; the proſpect of poſſeſſing it was never before preſented to ſo many minds. Multitudes, who by their birth and education, and not unfrequently by their talents, ſeemed deſtined to perpetual obſcurity, were, by the alternate riſe and fall of parties, elevated into diſtinction, and ſhared in the functions of government. The ſhort lived forms of power and office glided with ſuch rapidity through ſucceſſive ranks of degradation, from the court to the very dregs of the populace, that they ſeemed rather to ſolicit acceptance, than to be a prize contended for, * yet, as it was ſtill impoſſible for all to poſſeſs authority, though none were willing to obey, a general impatience to break the ranks and ruſh into the foremoſt ground, maddened and infuriated the nation, and overwhelmed law, order, and civilization, with the violence of a torrent.

If ſuch be the miſchiefs both in public and private life reſulting from an exceſſive ſelf eſtimation, it remains next to be conſidered whether Providence has ſupplied any medicine to correct it; for as the reflection on excellencies, whether

* ——— Æquo pulſat pede pauperum tabernas
Regumque turres. Hor.

real or imaginary, is always attended with pleasure to the possessor, it is a disease deeply seated in our nature.

Suppose there were a great and glorious Being always present with us, who had given us existence with numberless other blessings, and on whom we depended each instant, as well for every present enjoyment as for every future good; suppose again, we had incurred the just displeasure of such a Being, by ingratitude and disobedience, yet that in great mercy he had not cast us off, but had assured us he was willing to pardon and restore us, on our humble entreaty and sincere repentance: say, would not an habitual sense of the presence of this Being, self reproach for having displeased him, and an anxiety to recover his favor, be the most effectual antidote to pride? But such are the leading discoveries made by the christian revelation, and such the dispositions which a practical belief of it inspires.

Humility is the first fruit of religion. In the mouth of our Lord there is no maxim so frequent as the following, *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* Religion, and that alone, teaches *absolute* humility, by which I mean, a sense of our *absolute* nothingness, in the view of infinite greatness and excellence. That sense of inferiority, which results from the comparison of men with each other, is often an unwelcome sentiment forced upon the mind, which may rather embitter the temper than soften it: that which devotion impresses, is soothing and delightful. The devout man loves to lie low at the footstool of the Creator, because it is then he attains the most lively perceptions of the divine excellence, and the most tranquil confidence in the divine favor. In so august a presence he sees all distinctions lost, and all beings reduced to the same level; he looks at his superiors without envy, and his inferiors without contempt; and when from this elevation he descends to mix in society, the conviction of superiority which must in

many inſtances be felt, is a calm inference of the underſtanding, and no longer a buſy, importunate paſſion of the heart.

The wicked ſays the Pſalmiſt, *through the pride of their countenance, will not ſeek after God : God is not in all their thoughts.* When we conſider the incredible vanity of the atheiſtical ſect, together with the ſettled malignity, and unrelenting rancor with which they purſue every veſtige of religion ; is it uncandid to ſuppoſe, that its humbling tendency is one principle cauſe of their enmity ; that they are eager to diſplace a Deity from the minds of men, that they may occupy the void ; to crumble the throne of the Eternal into duſt, that they may elevate themſelves on its ruins ; and that, as their licentiouſneſs is impatient of reſtraint, ſo their pride diſdains a ſuperior ?

We mentioned a ferocity of character, as one effect of ſceptical impiety. It is an inconvenience attending a controverſy with thoſe with whom we have ſo few principles in common, that we are often in danger of reaſoning inconcluſively, for the want of its being clearly known and ſettled what our opponents admit and what they deny. The perſons, for example, with whom we are at preſent engaged, have diſcarded humility and modeſty from the catalogue of virtues ; on which account we have employed the more time in evincing their importance ; but whatever may be thought of humility as a *virtue*, it ſurely will not be denied that inhumanity is a moſt deteſtable *vice ;* a vice however, which ſcepticiſm has a moſt powerful tendency to inflame.

As we have already ſhewn that pride hardens the heart, and that religion is the only effectual antidote, the connection between irreligion and inhumanity is, in this view, obvious. But there is another light in which this part of the ſubject may be viewed, in my humble opinion, much more important though ſeldom adverted to. The ſuppoſition that man is a moral and accountable being, deſtined to ſurvive the

ſtroke of death, and to live in a future world in a never ending ſtate of happineſs or miſery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *conſequence*, than the oppoſite ſuppoſition. When we conſider him as placed here by an almighty Ruler, in a ſtate of probation, and that the preſent life is his period of trial, the firſt link in a vaſt and interminable chain which ſtretches into eternity, he aſſumes a dignified character in our eyes. Every thing which relates to him becomes intereſting; and to trifle with his happineſs is felt to be the moſt unpardonable levity. If ſuch be the deſtination of man, it is evident, that in the qualities which fit him for it, his principal dignity conſiſts: his moral greatneſs is his true greatneſs. Let the ſceptical principles be admitted which repreſent him, on the contrary, as the offſpring of chance, connected with no ſuperior power, and ſinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature, whoſe exiſtence and happineſs are inſignificant. The characteriſtic difference is loſt betwix him and the brute creation, from which he is no longer diſtinguiſhed, except by the vividneſs and multiplicity of his perceptions.

If we reflect on that part of our nature which diſpoſes us to humanity, we ſhall find that, where we have no particular attachment, our ſympathy with the ſufferings, and concern for the deſtruction of ſenſitive beings, is in proportion to their ſuppoſed importance in the general ſcale; or, in other words, to their ſuppoſed capacity of enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witneſſing the deſtruction of a man than of an inferior animal, becauſe we conſider it as involving the extinction of a much greater ſum of happineſs. For the ſame reaſon, he who would ſhudder at the ſlaughter of a large animal, will ſee a thouſand inſects periſh without a pang. Our ſympathy with the calamities of our fellow creatures is adjuſted to the ſame proportions: for we feel more powerfully affected with the diſtreſſes of fallen greatneſs, than with

equal or greater diſtreſſes ſuſtained by perſons of inferior rank ; becauſe, having been accuſtomed to aſſociate with an elevated ſtation the idea of ſuperior happineſs, the loſs appears the greater, and the wreck more extenſive. But the diſproportion in importance, betwixt man and the meaneſt inſect is not ſo great, as that which ſubſiſts betwixt man conſidered as *mortal* and as *immortal ;* that is, betwixt man as he is repreſented by the ſyſtem of ſcepticiſm, and that of divine revelation : for the enjoyment of the meaneſt inſect bears ſome proportion, though a very ſmall one, to the preſent happineſs of man ; but the happineſs of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The ſceptical ſyſtem, therefore, ſinks the importance of human exiſtence to an inconceivable degree.

From theſe principles reſults the following important inference, that, to extinguiſh human life by the hand of violence, muſt be quite a different thing in the eyes of a ſceptic from what it is in thoſe of a chriſtian. With the ſceptic it is nothing more than diverting the courſe of a little red fluid called blood ; it is merely leſſening the number by one of many millions of fugitive contemptible creatures : the chriſtian ſees, in the ſame event, an accountable being cut off from a ſtate of probation, and hurried, perhaps unprepared, into the preſence of his Judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable ſentence, which is to fix him for ever in an unalterable condition of felicity or wo. The former perceives in death nothing but its phyſical circumſtances ; the latter is impreſſed with the magnitude of its moral conſequences. It is the moral relation which man is ſuppoſed to bear to a ſuperior power, the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his preſent diſpoſitions and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal deſtiny more than any ſuperiority of intellectual powers, abſtracted from theſe conſiderations, which inveſt him with ſuch myſterious grandeur,

and conſtitute the firmeſt guard on the ſanctuary of human life. This reaſoning, it is true, ſerves more *immediately* to ſhew how the diſbelief of a future ſtate endangers the ſecurity of life ; but though this be its *direct* conſequence, it extends by analogy much farther : ſince he, who has learned to ſport with the *lives* of his fellow creatures, will feel but little ſolicitude for their welfare in any other inſtance ; but, as the greater includes the leſs, will eaſily paſs from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not ſeen till the moment of attack, ſo in that tranquil ſtate of ſociety, in which law and order maintain their aſcendancy, it is not perceived, perhaps not even ſuſpected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern infidelity leave us naked and defenceleſs. But, let the ſtate be convulſed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the ſtill ſmall voice of law drowned in the tempeſt of popular fury, (events which recent experience ſhews to be poſſible) it will then be ſeen that atheiſm is a ſchool of ferocity ; and that, having taught its diſciples to conſider mankind as little better than a neſt of inſects, they will be prepared, in the fierce conflicts of party, to trample upon them without pity, and extinguiſh them without remorſe.

It was late* before the atheiſm of Epicurus gained footing at Rome, but its prevalence was ſoon followed by ſuch ſcenes of proſcription, confiſcation, and blood, as were *then* unparalleled in the hiſtory of the world ; from which the republic being never able to recover itſelf, after many unſucceſsful ſtruggles, exchanged liberty for repoſe, by ſubmiſſion to abſolute power. Such were the effects of atheiſm at Rome. An attempt has been recently made to eſtabliſh a ſimilar ſyſtem in France, the conſequences of which are too well known,

* Neque enim aſſentior iis qui *hæc nuper* diſſerare cœperunt cum corporibus ſimul animos interire atque omnia morte deleri. *Cicero de Amicitia.*

to render it requiſite for me to ſhock your feelings by a recital. The only doubt that can ariſe is, whether the barbarities which have ſtained the revolution in that unhappy country are juſtly chargeable on the prevalence of atheiſm. Let thoſe, who doubt of this, recollect that the men, who, by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change; *Voltaire*, *D'Alembert*, *Diderot*, *Rouſſeau*, and others, were avowed enemies of revelation; that, in all their writings, the diffuſion of ſcepticiſm and of revolutionary principles went hand in hand; that the fury of the moſt ſanguinary parties was eſpecially pointed againſt the chriſtian prieſthood* and religious inſtitutions, without once

* The Author finds he has given great offence to ſome friends whom he highly eſteems, by applying the term *Chriſtian prieſthood* to the popiſh clergy. He begs leave to make a remark or two by way of apology.

1. It is admitted by all candid proteſtants, that ſalvation is attainable in the Roman catholic church; but he ſhould be glad to be informed what part of the Chriſtian covenant entitles us to expect the ſalvation of thoſe (where the goſpel is promulgated) who are not even a branch of the viſible church of Chriſt. The papiſtical tenets are either *fundamentally* erroneous, on which ſuppoſition it is certain no papiſt can be ſaved, or their errors muſt be conſiſtent with Chriſtian faith, and conſequently cannot be a valid reaſon for excluding thoſe who maintain them from being a part (a moſt corrupt part, if you pleaſe, but ſtill a part) of the chriſtian church.

2. The popiſh clergy were perſecuted under the *character of chriſtians*, not under the notion of heretics or ſchiſmatics. They, who were the ſubjects of perſecution, were certainly the beſt judges of its aim and direction: and when the archbiſhop of Paris, and others, endeavored to ſcreen themſelves from its effects by a recantation, what did they recant? Was it popery? no; but the profeſſion of chriſtianity. Theſe apoſtates, doubtleſs, meant to remove the ground of offence, which, in their opinion, was the chriſtian profeſſion. If the ſoundeſt eccleſiaſtical hiſtorians have not refuſed the honors of martyrdom to ſuch as ſuffered in the cauſe of truth amongſt the Gnoſtics, it ill becomes the liberality of the preſent age to contemplate, with ſullen indifference, or malicious joy, the ſufferings of conſcientious catholics.

3. At the period to which the author refers, chriſtian worſhip, of *every kind*, was prohibited, while, in ſolemn mockery of religion, adoration was paid to a ſtrumpet, under the title of the goddeſs of reaſon. Is it neceſſary to prove that men, who were thus abandoned, muſt be hoſtile to true religion, under every form? or, if there be any gradations in their abhorrence, to that moſt which is the moſt pure and perfect? Are atheiſm and obſcenity more congenial to the proteſtant than to the popiſh profeſſion? To have incurred the hatred of the ruling party of France at the ſeaſon alluded to, is an honor which the author would be ſorry to reſign, as the excluſive boaſt of the church of Rome: to have been the object of the partiality of ſuch bloody and inhuman monſters, would have been a ſtain upon proteſtants which the virtue of ages could not obliterate.

pretending like other perſecutors to execute the vengeance of God (whoſe name they never mentioned) upon his enemies ; that their atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment ; that the reign of atheiſm was avowedly and expreſsly the reign of terror ; that in the full madneſs of their career, in the higheſt climax of their horrors, they ſhut up the temples of God, aboliſhed his worſhip, and proclaimed death to be an eternal ſleep ; as if, by pointing to the ſilence of the ſepulchre, and the ſleep of the dead, theſe ferocious barbarians meant to apologize for leaving neither ſleep, quiet, nor repoſe to the living.

As the heathens fabled that Minerva iſſued full armed from the head of Jupiter ; ſo no ſooner were the ſpeculations of atheiſtical philoſophy matured, than they gave birth to a ferocity which converted the moſt poliſhed people in Europe into a horde of aſſaſſins ; the ſeat of voluptuous refinement, of pleaſure and of arts, into a theatre of blood.

Having already ſhewn, that the principles of infidelity facilitate the commiſſion of crimes by removing the reſtraints of fear, and that they foſter the arrogance of the individual, while they inculcate the moſt deſpicable opinion of the ſpecies, the inevitable reſult is, that a haughty ſelf confidence, a contempt of mankind, together with a daring defiance of religious reſtraints ; are the natural ingredients of the atheiſtical character ; nor is it leſs evident that theſe are, of all others, the diſpoſitions which moſt forcibly ſtimulate to violence and cruelty.

Settle it therefore in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that atheiſm is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious ſyſtem, equally hoſtile to every uſeful reſtraint, and to every virtuous affection ; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor around us to awaken tenderneſs ; it wages

war with heaven and earth; its firſt object is to dethrone God, its next to deſtroy man.*

There is a third vice not leſs deſtructive than either of thoſe which have been already mentioned, to which the ſyſtem of modern infidelity is favorable; that is, unbridled ſenſuality, the licentious and unreſtrained indulgence of thoſe paſſions which are eſſential to the continuation of the ſpecies. The magnitude of thoſe paſſions, and their ſupreme importance to the exiſtence as well as the peace and welfare of ſociety, have rendered it one of the chief objects of ſolicitude with every wiſe legiſlature, to reſtrain them by ſuch laws, and to confine their indulgence within ſuch limits, as ſhall beſt promote the great ends for which they were implanted.

The benevolence and wiſdom of the Author of chriſtianity are eminently conſpicuous in the laws he has enacted on this branch of morals; for, while he authoriſes marriage, he reſtrains the vagrancy and caprice of the paſſions, by forbidding polygamy and divorce; and, well knowing that offences againſt the laws of chaſtity uſually ſpring from an ill regulated imagination, he inculcates purity of heart. Among innumerable benefits which the world has derived from the chriſtian religion, a ſuperior refinement in the ſexual ſentiments, a more equal and reſpectful treatment of women, greater dignity and permanence conferred on the inſtitution of marriage, are not the leaſt conſiderable: in conſequence of which the pureſt affections, and the moſt ſacred duties, are grafted on the ſtock of the ſtrongeſt inſtincts.

The aim of all the leading champions of infidelity is, to rob mankind of theſe benefits, and throw them back into a

* As human nature is the ſame in all ages, it is not ſurpriſing to find the ſame moral ſyſtems, even in the moſt diſſimilar circumſtances, produce correſponding effects. *Joſephus* remarks that the Sadducees, a kind of Jewiſh infidels, whoſe tenets were the denial of a moral government and a future ſtate, were diſtinguiſhed from the other ſects by their ferocity. *De Bell, Jud. lib.* 2. He elſewhere remarks, that they were eminent for their inhumanity in their judicial capacity.

ſtate of groſs and brutal ſenſuality. Mr. *Hume* repreſents the private conduct of the profligate *Charles*, whoſe debaucheries polluted the age, as a juſt ſubject of panegyric. A diſciple in the ſame ſchool has lately had the unbluſhing effrontery to ſtigmatize marriage as the worſt of all monopolies ; and, in a narrative of his licentious amors, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by ſubmitting to its reſtraint. The popular productions on the continent, which iſſue from the atheiſtical ſchool, are inceſſantly directed to the ſame purpoſe.

Under every poſſible aſpect in which infidelity can be viewed, it extends the dominion of ſenſuality : it repeals and abrogates every law by which divine revelation has, under ſuch awful ſanctions, reſtrained the indulgence of the paſſions : the diſbelief of a ſupreme omniſcient Being which it inculcates, releaſes its diſciples from an attention to the *heart*, from every care but that of outward decorum ; and the excluſion of the devout affections and an unſeen world, leaves the mind immerſed in viſible, ſenſible objects.

There are two ſorts of pleaſures, corporeal and mental : Though we are indebted to the ſenſes for all our perceptions *originally*, yet thoſe, which are at the fartheſt remove from their *immediate impreſſions*, confer the moſt elevation on the character, ſince, in proportion as they are multiplied and augmented, the ſlaviſh ſubjection to the ſenſes is ſubdued. Hence the true and only antidote to debaſing ſenſuality is, the poſſeſſion of a fund of that *kind of enjoyment* which is independent of the corporeal appetites. Inferior in the perfection of ſeveral of his ſenſes to different parts of the brute creation, the ſuperiority of man over them all conſiſts in his ſuperior power of multiplying, by new combinations, his mental perceptions, and thereby of creating to himſelf reſources of happineſs, ſeparate from external ſenſation. In the ſcale of enjoyment, the firſt remove from ſenſe are the pleaſures of

reaſon and ſociety ; the next are the pleaſures of devotion and religion. The former, though totally diſtinct from thoſe of ſenſe, are yet leſs perfectly adapted to moderate their exceſſes than the laſt ; as they are in a great meaſure converſant with viſible and ſenſible objects. The religious ſentiments and affections are, in fact, and were intended to be, the *proper antagoniſt* of ſenſuality, the great deliverer from the thraldom of the appetites ; by opening a ſpiritual world, and inſpiring hopes, and fears, and conſolations, and joys, which bear no relation to the material and inviſible univerſe. The criminal indulgence of ſenſual paſſions admits but of two modes of prevention ; the eſtabliſhment of ſuch laws and maxims in ſociety as ſhall render lewd profligacy impracticable or infamous ; or, the infuſion of ſuch principles and habits as ſhall render it diſtaſteful : human legiſlatures have encountered the diſeaſe in the firſt, the truths and ſanctions of revealed religion, in the laſt of theſe methods : to both of which the advocates of modern infidelity are equally hoſtile.

So much has been ſaid by many able writers to evince the inconceivable benefit of the marriage inſtitution, that to hear it ſeriouſly attacked by men who ſtile themſelves philoſophers, at the cloſe of the eighteenth century, muſt awaken indignation and ſurpriſe. The object of this diſcourſe leads us to direct our attention particularly to the influence of this inſtitution, on the *civilization* of the world.

From the records of revelation we learn, that marriage, or the *permanent union* of the ſexes, was ordained by God, and exiſted under different modifications in the early infancy of mankind, without which they could never have emerged from barbariſm. For, conceive only what eternal diſcord, jealouſy and violence would enſue, were the objects of the tendereſt affections ſecured to their poſſeſſor by no law or tie of moral obligation ; were domeſtic enjoyments diſturbed by inceſſant fear, and licentiouſneſs inflamed by hope. Who could find

ſufficient tranquillity of mind, to enable him to plan or execute any continued ſcheme of action, or what room for arts, or ſciences, or religion, or virtue, in that ſtate in which the chief earthly happineſs was expoſed to every lawleſs invader; where one was racked with an inceſſant anxiety to keep what the other was equally eager to acquire? It is not probable in itſelf, independent of the light of ſcripture, that the benevolent Author of the human race ever placed them in ſo wretched a condition at firſt; it is certain they could not remain in it long without being exterminated. Marriage, by ſhutting out theſe evils, and enabling every man to reſt ſecure in his enjoyments, is the great civilizer of the world; with this ſecurity the mind is at liberty to expand in generous affections, has leiſure to look abroad, and engage in the purſuits of knowledge, ſcience, and virtue.

Nor is it in this way only that marriage inſtitutions are eſſential to the welfare of mankind. They are ſources of tenderneſs, as well as the guardians of peace. Without the permanent union of the ſexes, there can be no permanent families: the diſſolution of nuptial ties involves the diſſolution of domeſtic ſociety. But domeſtic ſociety is the ſeminary of ſocial affections, the cradle of ſenſibility, where the firſt elements are acquired of that tenderneſs and humanity, which cement mankind together, and which, were they entirely extinguiſhed, the whole fabric of ſocial inſtitutions would be diſſolved.

Families are ſo many centres of attraction, which preſerve mankind from being ſcattered and diſſipated by the repulſive powers of ſelfiſhneſs. The order of nature is, evermore, from particulars to generals. As, in the operations of intellect, we proceed from the contemplation of individuals to the formation of general abſtractions, ſo in the developement of the paſſions, in like manner, we advance from private to public affections, from the love of parents, brothers, and

ſiſters, to thoſe more expanded regards, which embrace the immenſe ſociety of human kind.*

In order to render men benevolent, they muſt firſt be made tender: for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reaſoning; they reſult from that culture of the heart, from thoſe early impreſſions of tenderneſs, gratitude, and ſympathy, which the endearments of domeſtic life are ſure to ſupply, and for the formation of which it is the beſt poſſible ſchool.

The advocates of infidelity invert this eternal order of nature. Inſtead of inculcating the private affections as a diſcipline by which the mind is prepared for thoſe of a more public nature, they ſet them in direct oppoſition to each other; they propoſe to build general benevolence on the deſtruction of individual tenderneſs, and to make us love the whole ſpecies more, by loving every particular part of it leſs. In purſuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other ſocial diſpoſition, are reprobated; virtue is limited to a paſſionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to aſk, when all the tenderneſs of life is extinguiſhed, and all the bands of ſociety are untwiſted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to ſpring?

When this ſavage philoſophy has completed its work, when it has taught its diſciple to look with perfect indifference on the offspring of his body and the wife of his boſom, to eſtrange himſelf from his friends, inſult his benefactors, and ſilence the pleadings of gratitude and pity; will he, by thus diveſting himſelf of all that is human, be better prepared

* Arctior vero colligatio ſocietatis propinquorum: ab illa enim immenſa ſocietate humani generis, in exiguum anguſtumque concluditur, nam cum ſit hoc natura commune animantium ut habeant libidinem procreandi prima ſocietas in ipſo conjugio eſt, proxima in liberis, deinde una domus, communia omnia. Id autem eſt principium urbis, et quaſi ſeminarium reipublicæ. *Cic. de Off.*

for the diſintereſted love of his ſpecies ? Will he become a philanthropiſt only becauſe he has ceaſed to be a man ? Rather, in this total exemption from all the feelings which humanize and ſoften, in this chilling froſt of univerſal indifference, may we not be certain ſelfiſhneſs, unmingled and uncontroled, will aſſume the empire of his heart ; and that, under pretence of advancing the general good, an object to which the fancy may give innumerable ſhapes, he will be prepared for the violation of every duty, and the perpetration of every crime ? Extended benevolence is the laſt and moſt perfect fruit of the private affections ; ſo that to expect to reap the former from the extinction of the latter, is to oppoſe the means to the end ; is as abſurd as to attempt to reach the ſummit of the higheſt mountain, without paſſing through the intermediate ſpaces, or to hope to attain the heights of ſcience by forgetting the firſt elements of knowledge. Theſe abſurdities have ſprung, however, in the advocates of infidelity, from an ignorance of human nature, ſufficient to diſgrace even thoſe who did not ſtile themſelves philoſophers. Preſuming, contrary to the experience of every moment, that the affections are awakened by *reaſoning*, and perceiving that the general good is an incomparably greater *object in itſelf*, than the happineſs of any limited number of individuals, they inferred nothing more was neceſſary than to exhibit it in its juſt dimenſions ; to draw the *affections* towards it ; as though the fact of the ſuperior populouſneſs of China to Great Britain, needed but to be known, to render us indifferent to our domeſtic concerns, and to lead us to direct all our anxiety, to the proſperity of that vaſt, but remote empire.

It is not the province of reaſon to awaken new paſſions, or open new ſources of ſenſibility, but to direct us in the attainment of thoſe objects which nature has already rendered pleaſing, or to determine among the interfering inclinations and paſſions that ſway the mind, which are the fitteſt to be preferred.

Is a regard to the general good then, you will reply, to be excluded from the motives of action ? Nothing is more remote from my intention : but as the nature of this motive has, in my opinion, been much misunderstood by some good men, and abused by others of a different description, to the worst of purposes, permit me to declare, in a few words, what appears to me to be the truth on this subject.

The welfare of the whole system of being must be allowed to be, *in itself*, the object of all others the most worthy of being pursued ; so that, could the mind distinctly embrace it, and discern at every step *what action* would infallibly promote it, we should be furnished with a sure criterion of right and wrong, an unerring guide which would supersede the use and necessity of all inferior rules, laws, and principles.

But this being impossible, since the good of the *whole* is a motive so loose and indeterminate, and embraces such an infinity of relations, that before we could be certain what action it prescribed, the season of action would be past ; to weak, short sighted mortals, Providence has assigned a sphere of agency, less grand and extensive indeed, but better suited to their limited powers, by implanting certain *affections* which it is their duty to cultivate, and suggesting particular rules to which they are bound to conform. By these provisions, the boundaries of virtue are easily ascertained, at the same time that its ultimate object, the good of the whole, is secured ; for, since the happiness of the entire system results from the happiness of the several parts, the affections which confine the attention *immediately* to the latter, conspire in the end to the promotion of the former ; as the laborer whose industry is limited to the corner of a large building, performs his part towards rearing the structure, much more effectually than if he extended his care to the whole.

As the interest, however, of any limited number of persons may not only not contribute, but may possibly be directly op-

poſed to the general good ; the intereſt of a family, for example, to that of a province, or, of a nation to that of the world ; Providence has ſo ordered it, that in a well regulated mind there ſprings up, as we have already ſeen, beſides particular attachments, *an extended regard to the ſpecies*, whoſe office is twofold ; not to *deſtroy* and *extinguiſh* the more private affections, which is mental parricide ; but firſt, as far as is conſiſtent with the claims of thoſe who are immediately committed to our care, *to do good to all men ;* ſecondly, to exerciſe a juriſdiction and control over the private affections, ſo as to prohibit their indulgence, whenever it would be attended with *manifeſt detriment* to the whole. Thus every part of our nature is brought into action ; all the practical principles of the human heart find an element to move in, each in its different ſort and manner, conſpiring, without mutual colliſions, to maintain the harmony of the world and the happineſs of the univerſe.*

* It is ſomewhat ſingular, that many of the faſhionable infidels have hit upon a definition of virtue, which perfectly coincides with that of certain metaphyſical divines in America, firſt invented and defended by that moſt acute reaſoner, *Jonathan Edwards*. They both place virtue, excluſively, in a paſſion for the general good, or, as Mr. *Edwards* expreſſes it, *love to Being in general ;* ſo that our love is always to be proportioned to the magnitude of its object in the great ſcale of Being; which is liable to the objections I have already ſtated as well as to many others, which the limits of this note will not permit me to enumerate. Let it ſuffice to remark, 1. That virtue on theſe principles is an utter impoſſibility ; for the ſyſtem of Being comprehending the great Supreme, is *infinite*, and therefore to maintain the proper proportion, the force of particular attachment muſt be infinitely leſs than the paſſion for the general good ; but the limits of the human mind are not capable of any emotions ſo infinitely different *in degree*. 2. Since *our views* of the extent of the univerſe are capable of perpetual enlargement, admitting the ſum of exiſtence is ever the ſame, we muſt return back at each ſtep to diminiſh the ſtrength of particular affections, or they will become diſproportionate, and conſequently on theſe principles vicious ; ſo that the balance muſt be continually fluctuating, by the weights being taken out of one ſcale and put into the other. 3. If virtue conſiſt *excluſively* in love to Being in general, or attachment to the general good, the particular affections are, to every purpoſe of virtue, uſeleſs, and even pernicious ; for their immediate, nay their neceſſary tendency is, to attract to their objects a proportion of attention, which far exceeds their comparative value in the general ſcale. To allege that the *general good* is promoted by them will be

Before I close this discourse, I cannot omit to mention three circumstances attending the propagation of infidelity, by its present abettors, equally new and alarming.

1. It is the first attempt which has been ever witnessed on an extensive scale, to establish *the principles of atheism*; the first effort which history has recorded to disannul and extinguish the belief of all superior powers; the consequence of which, should it succeed, will be to place mankind in a situation never before experienced, not during the ages of pagan darkness. The system of polytheism was as remote from modern infidelity as from true religion. Amidst that rubbish of superstition, the product of fear, ignorance and vice, which had been accumulating for ages, some faint embers of sacred truth remained unextinguished; the interposition of unseen powers in the affairs of men was believed and revered, the

of no advantage to the defence of this system, but the contrary, by confessing that a greater sum of happiness is attained by a deviation from, than an adherence to, its principles; unless its advocates mean by the love of Being in general, the same thing as the private affections, which is to confound all the distinctions of language, as well as all the operations of mind. Let it be remembered, we have no dispute what is the ultimate end of virtue, which is allowed on both sides to be the greatest sum of happiness in the universe: the question is merely, what is *virtue itself?* or, in other words, what are the means appointed for the attainment of that end.

There is little doubt from some part of Mr. *Godwin's* work, entitled "*Political Justice*," as well as from his early habits of reading, that he was indebted to Mr. *Edwards* for his principal arguments against the private affections; though with a daring consistence, he has pursued his principles to an extreme from which that most excellent man would have revolted with horror! The fundamental error of the whole system arose, as I conceive, from a mistaken pursuit of simplicity; from a wish to construct a moral system without leaving sufficient scope for the infinite variety of moral phenomena and mental combination, in consequence of which, its advocates were induced to place virtue *exclusively* in some *one disposition* of mind, and since the passion for the general good is undeniably the *noblest* and most extensive of all others, when it was once resolved to place virtue in any *one thing*, there remained little room to hesitate which should be preferred. It might have been worth while to reflect, that in the natural world there are two kinds of attraction; one, which holds the several *parts* of individual bodies in contact; another, which maintains the union of bodies themselves with the general system; and that though the union in the former case is much more *intimate* than in the latter, they are equally essential to the order of the world. Similar to this is the relation which the public and private affections bear to each other, and their use in the moral system.

ſanctity of oaths was maintained, the idea of *revelation* and of *tradition* as a ſource of religious knowledge, was familiar, a uſeful perſuaſion of the exiſtence of a future world was kept alive, and the greater gods were looked up to as the guardians of the public welfare, the patrons of thoſe virtues which promote the proſperity of ſtates, and the avengers of injuſtice, perfidy and fraud.*

* The teſtimony of *Polybius*, to the beneficial effects which reſulted from the ſyſtem of Pagan ſuperſtition, in fortifying the ſentiments of moral obligation, and ſupporting the ſanctity of oaths, is ſo weighty and deciſive, that it would be an injuſtice to the ſubject not to inſert it: more eſpecially as it is impoſſible to attribute it to the influence of credulity on the author himſelf, who was, evidently, a ſceptic. It is ſcarcely neceſſary to remark, that all the benefits which might in any way flow from ſuperſtition, are ſecured to an incomparably greater degree by the belief of true religion.

"But among all the uſeful inſtitutions," ſays *Polybius*, "that demonſtrate the ſuperior excellence of the Roman government, the moſt conſiderable, perhaps, is the opinion which the people are taught to hold concerning the gods; and that which other men regard as an object of diſgrace, appears in my judgment to be the very thing by which this republic is chiefly ſuſtained. I mean ſuperſtition; which is impreſſed, with all its terrors and influences, both on the private actions of the citizens and the public adminiſtration of the ſtate, to a degree that can ſcarcely be exceeded.

"The ancients therefore acted not abſurdly, nor without good reaſon, when they inculcated the notions concerning the gods, and the belief of infernal puniſhments; but much rather *are thoſe of the preſent age to be charged with raſhneſs and abſurdity* in endeavoring to extirpate theſe opinions; for, not to mention other effects that flow from ſuch an inſtitution, if among the Greeks, for example, a ſingle talent only be entruſted to thoſe who have the management of any of the public money, though they give ten written ſureties, with as many ſeals, and twice as many witneſſes, they are unable to diſcharge the truſt repoſed in them with integrity. But the Romans, on the other hand, who in the courſe of their magiſtracies and in embaſſies diſburſe the greateſt ſums, are prevailed on, by the ſingle obligation of an oath, to perform their duty with inviolable honeſty. And as, in other ſtates, a man is rarely to be found whoſe hands are pure from public robbery, ſo, amongſt the Romans, it is no leſs rare to diſcover one that is tainted with this crime." *Hampton's Polybius. Vol.* 3. *B.* 6.

Though the ſyſtem of paganiſm is juſtly condemned by reaſon and ſcripture, yet it aſſumed as true ſeveral principles of the firſt importance to the preſervation of public manners; ſuch as a perſuaſion of inviſible power, of the folly of incurring the divine vengeance for the attainment of any preſent advantage, and the divine approbation of virtue; ſo that, ſtrictly ſpeaking, it was the mixture of truth in it which gave it all its utility; which is well ſtated by the *great* and *judicious* HOOKER in treating on this ſubject. "Seeing, therefore, it doth thus appear," ſays that venerable Author, "that the ſafety of all ſtates dependeth upon religion; that religion unfeignedly loved perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous ſervices in the commonwealth; that men's deſire is, in general, to hold no religion but the true,

Of whatever benefit ſuperſtition might formerly be productive, by the ſcattered particles of truth which it contained, theſe advantages can now only be reaped from the ſoil of true religion; nor is there any other alternative left than the belief of chriſtianity, or abſolute atheiſm, in the revolution, of the human mind, exploded *opinions* are often revived, but an exploded ſuperſtition never recovers its credit. The pretenſion to divine Revelation is ſo auguſt and commanding, that, when its falſehood is once diſcerned, it is covered with all the ignominy of detected impoſture; it falls from ſuch a height (to change the figure) that it is inevitably crumbled into atoms. Religions, whether falſe or true, are not creatures of arbitrary inſtitution. After diſcrediting the principles of piety, ſhould our modern free thinkers find it neceſſary, in order to reſtrain the exceſſes of ferocity, to ſeek for a ſubſtitute in ſome popular ſuperſtition, it will prove a vain and impracticable attempt: they may recal the names, reſtore the altars, and revive the ceremonies, but to rekindle the ſpirit of heatheniſm will exceed their power; becauſe it is impoſſible to enact ignorance by law, or to repeal, by legiſlative authority, the dictates of reaſon, and the light of ſcience.

2. The efforts of infidels, to diffuſe the principles of infidelity among the common people, is another alarming ſymptom peculiar to the preſent time. *Hume*, *Bolingbroke*, and *Gibbon* addreſſed themſelves ſolely to the more poliſhed claſſes of the community, and would have thought their refined ſpeculations debaſed by an attempt to enliſt diſciples from among the populace. Infidelity has lately grown condeſcending: bred in the ſpeculations of a daring philoſophy, immured at

and that whatever good effects do grow out of their religion, who embrace, inſtead of the true, a falſe, the roots thereof are certain ſparks of the light of truth intermingled with the darkneſs of error, becauſe no religion can wholly and only conſiſt of untruths, we have reaſon to think that all true virtues are to honor *true religion* as their parent, and all well ordered common weals to love her as their chiefeſt ſtay." *Eccl. Pol. B.* 5.

firſt in the cloiſters of the learned, and afterwards nurſed in the lap of voluptuouſneſs and of courts; having at length reached its full maturity, it boldly ventures to challenge the ſuffrages of the people, ſolicits the acquaintance of peaſants and mechanics, and ſeeks to draw whole nations to its ſtandard.

It is not difficult to account for this new ſtate of things. While infidelity was rare, it was employed as the inſtrument of literary vanity; its wide diffuſion having diſqualified it for anſwering that purpoſe, it is now adopted as the organ of political convulſion. Literary diſtinction is conferred by the approbation of a few; but the total ſubverſion and overthrow of ſociety demands the concurrence of millions.

3. The infidels of the preſent day are the firſt ſophiſts who have preſumed to innovate in the very *ſubſtance* of morals. The diſputes on moral queſtions hitherto agitated amongſt philoſophers have reſpected the *grounds* of duty, not the *nature of duty itſelf*; or they have been merely metaphyſical, and related to the *hiſtory* of moral ſentiments in the mind, the ſources and principles from which they were moſt eaſily deduced; they never turned on the quality of thoſe diſpoſitions and actions which were to be denominated virtuous. In the firm perſuaſion that the love and fear of the ſupreme Being, the ſacred obſervation of promiſes and oaths, reverence to magiſtrates, obedience to parents, gratitude to benefactors, conjugal fidelity, and parental tenderneſs, were primary virtues, and the chief ſupport of every commonwealth, they were unanimous. The curſe denounced upon ſuch as remove ancient land marks, upon thoſe who call good evil and evil good, put light for darkneſs, and darkneſs for light, who employ their faculties to ſubvert the eternal diſtinctions of right and wrong, and thus to poiſon the ſtreams of virtue at their ſource, falls with accumulated weight on the advocates of modern infidelity, and on them alone.

Permit me to close this discourse with a few serious reflections. There is much, it must be confessed in the apostacy of multitudes, and the rapid progress of infidelity, to awaken our fears for the virtue of the rising generation; but nothing to shake our faith, nothing which scripture itself does not give us room to expect. The features which compose the character of apostates, their prophaneness, presumption, lewdness, impatience of subordination, restless appetite for change, vain pretensions to freedom and to emancipate the world, while themselves are the slaves of lust, the weapons with which they attack christianity and the snares they spread for the unwary, are depicted in the clearest colors by the pencil of prophecy. *Knowing this first*, says PETER, *that there shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts.** In the same epistle he more fully describes the persons he alludes to, *as chiefly them which walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government; presumptuous are they, self willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities; sporting themselves in their own deceivings, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sins; beguiling unstable souls; For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error; while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.*† Of the same characters JUDE admonishes us, *to remember that they were foretold as mockers, who should be in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they*, he adds, *who separate themselves* (by apostacy) *sensual, not having the spirit.* Infidelity is an evil of short duration. "*It has*," as a judicious writer observes, "*no individual subsistence given it in the system of prophecy. It is not a* BEAST, *but a mere putrid excrescence of the papal beast; an excrescence which, though it may diffuse death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet shall die along*

* 2 Peter, iii. v. 3. † 2 Peter, ii.

*with it.** Its enormities will haſten its overthrow. It is impoſſible that a ſyſtem, which, by vilifying every virtue, and embracing the patronage of almoſt every vice and crime, wages war with all the order and civilization of the world; which, equal to the eſtabliſhment of nothing, is armed only with the energies of deſtruction, can long retain an aſcendency. It is in no ſhape formed for perpetuity. Sudden in its riſe, and impetuous in its progreſs, it reſembles a mountain torrent, which is loud, filthy, and deſolating; but being fed by no perennial ſpring is ſoon drained off and diſappears. By permitting, to a certain extent, the prevalence of infidelity, Providence is preparing new triumphs for religion. In aſſerting its authority, the preachers of the goſpel have hitherto found it neceſſary to weigh the proſpects of immortality againſt the intereſts of time, to ſtrip the world of its charms, to inſiſt on the deceitfulneſs of pleaſure, the unſatisfying nature of riches, the emptineſs of grandeur, and the nothingneſs of a mere worldly life. Topics of this nature will always have their uſe; but it is not by ſuch repreſentations alone, that the importance of religion is evinced. The prevalence of impiety has armed us with new weapons in its defence.

Religion being primarily intended to make men *wiſe unto ſalvation*, the ſupport it miniſters to ſocial order, the ſtability it confers on government and laws, is a *ſubordinate ſpecies* of advantage which we ſhould have continued to enjoy without reflecting on its cauſe, but for the developement of deiſtical principles and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a neighboring country. It had been the conſtant boaſt of infidels, that their ſyſtem, more liberal and generous than chriſtianity, needed but to be tried to produce an immenſe acceſſion to human happineſs; and chriſtian nations, careleſs and ſupine, retaining little of religion but the pro-

* See an excellent work, lately publiſhed by the Rev. *A. Fuller*, entitled *The Goſpel its own Witneſs*. Sold by Mr. Bingham, and Meſſrs. Manning and Loring, Boſton, and by S. Etheridge, Charleſtown.

feſſion, and diſguſted with its reſtraints, lent a favorable ear to theſe pretenſions. God permitted the trial to be made: in one country, and that the centre of Chriſtendom, revelation underwent a total eclipſe,* while atheiſm performing on a darkened theatre its ſtrange and fearful tragedy confounded the firſt elements of ſociety, blended every age, rank and ſex, in indiſcriminate proſcription and maſſacre, and convulſed all Europe to its centre: that the imperiſhable memorial of theſe events might teach the laſt generations of mankind, to conſider religion as the pillar of ſociety, the ſafeguard of nations, the parent of ſocial order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the paſſions, and ſecure to every one his rights; to the laborious the reward of their induſtry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preſervation of their honors, and to princes the ſtability of their thrones.

We might aſk the patrons of infidelity, what fury impels them to attempt the ſubverſion of chriſtianity? Is it that they have diſcovered a better ſyſtem? To what virtues are their principles favorable, or is there one which chriſtians have not carried to a higher perfection than any of whom their party can boaſt? Have they diſcovered a more excellent rule of life, or a better hope in death, than that which the ſcriptures ſuggeſt? Above all, what are the pretenſions on which they reſt their claims to be the guides of mankind; or which embolden them to expect that we ſhould trample upon the experience of ages, and abandon a religion, which has been atteſted by a train of miracles and prophecies in which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble,

* It is worthy of attention that *Mercier* a warm advocate of the French Revolution, and a profeſſed deiſt, in his recent work, entitled "*New Paris*," acknowledges and laments the extinction of religion in France. "*We have*," ſays he, "*in proſcribing ſuperſtition, deſtroyed all religious ſentiment: but this is not the way to regenerate the world.*" See Appendix to the 30th Vol. MONTHLY REVIEW.

and conſolation in the hour of death; a religion which has been adorned with the higheſt ſanctity of character and ſplendor of talents, which enrols amongſt its diſciples the names of Bacon, Newton, and Locke, the glory of their ſpecies, and to which theſe illuſtrious men were proud to dedicate the laſt and beſt fruits of their immortal genius?

If the queſtion at iſſue is to be decided by argument, nothing can be added to the triumph of chriſtianity; if by an appeal to authority, what have our adverſaries to oppoſe to theſe great names? Where are the infidels of ſuch pure, uncontaminated morals, unſhaken probity, and extended benevolence, that we ſhould be in danger of being ſeduced into impiety by their example? Into what obſcure receſſes of miſery, into what dungeons, have their philanthropiſts penetrated to lighten the fetters and relieve the ſorrows of the helpleſs captive? What barbarous tribes have their apoſtles viſited, what diſtant climes have *they* explored, encompaſſed with cold, nakedneſs and want, to diffuſe principles of virtue and the bleſſings of civilization? Or will they rather chuſe to wave their pretenſions to this extraordinary, and in their eyes, eccentric ſpecies of benevolence (for infidels, we know, are ſworn enemies to enthuſiaſm of every ſort) and reſt their character on their political exploits, on their efforts to reanimate the virtue of a ſinking ſtate, to reſtrain licentiouſneſs, to calm the tumult of popular fury, and by inculcating the ſpirit of juſtice, moderation, and pity for fallen greatneſs, to mitigate the inevitable horrors of revolution? Our adverſaries will at leaſt have the diſcretion, if not the modeſty, to recede from this teſt.

More than all, their infatuated eagerneſs, their parricidal zeal to extinguiſh a ſenſe of Deity, muſt excite aſtoniſhment and horror. Is the idea of an Almighty and perfect Ruler, unfriendly to any paſſion which is conſiſtent with innocence, or an obſtruction to any deſign which it is not ſhameful to

avow ? Eternal God ! on what are thine enemies intent : what are thoſe enterpriſes of guilt and horror, that, for the ſafety of their performers, require to be enveloped in a darkneſs which the eye of heaven muſt not pierce ! Miſerable men ! proud of being the offſpring of chance ; in love with univerſal diſorder ; whoſe happineſs is involved in the belief of there being no witneſs to their deſigns, and who are at eaſe only becauſe they ſuppoſe themſelves inhabitants of a forſaken and fatherleſs world !

Having been led by the nature of the ſubject to conſider chiefly, the manner in which ſceptical impiety affects the welfare of ſtates, it is the more requiſite to warn you againſt that moſt fatal miſtake of regarding religion as an engine of policy; and to recal to your recollection, that the concern we have in it, is much more as *individuals* than as *collective bodies*, and far leſs temporal than eternal. The happineſs it confers in the preſent life are bleſſings which it ſcatters by the way in its march to immortality. That future condition of being which it aſcertains, and for which its promiſes and truths are meant to prepare us, is the ultimate end of human ſocieties, the final ſcope and object of preſent exiſtence, in compariſon of which, all the revolutions of nations, and all the viciſſitudes of time, are light and tranſitory. *Godlineſs has*, it is true, *the promiſe of the life that now is*, but chiefly *of that which is to come.* Other acquiſitions may be requiſite to make men great ; but be aſſured, the religion of Jeſus is alone ſufficient to make them good and happy. Powerful ſources of conſolation in ſorrow, unſhaken fortitude amidſt the changes and perturbations of the world, humility remote from meanneſs, and dignity unſtained by pride, contentment in every ſtation, paſſions pure and calm, with habitual ſerenity, the full enjoyment of life, undiſturbed by the dread of diſſolution, or the fear of an hereafter, are its invaluable gifts. To theſe enjoyments, however,

you will neceſſarily continue ſtrangers, unleſs you reſign yourſelves wholly to its power; for the conſolations of religion are reſerved to reward, to ſweeten, and to ſtimulate obedience. Many without renouncing the profeſſion of chriſtianity, without formally rejecting its diſtinguiſhing doctrines, live in ſuch an habitual violation of its laws, and contradiction to its ſpirit, that conſcious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination, inſtead of tranquillizing their hearts, and hangs with depreſſing weight on all their enjoyments and purſuits. Their religion, inſtead of comforting them under their troubles, is itſelf their greateſt trouble, from which they ſeek refuge in the diſſipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conſcience force them back upon religion. Thus ſuſpended betwixt oppoſite powers, the ſport of contradictory influences, they are diſqualified for the happineſs of both worlds, and neither enjoy the pleaſures of ſin, nor the peace of piety. Is it ſurpriſing to find a mind bewildered in uncertainty, and diſſatisfied with itſelf, court deception, and embrace with eagerneſs every pretext to mutilate the claims and enervate the authority of chriſtianity, forgetting that it is of the very eſſence of religious principle to preſide and control, and that it is impoſſible to *ſerve God and mammon.* It is this claſs of profeſſors, who are chiefly in danger of being entangled in the ſnares of infidelity.

The champions of infidelity have much more reaſon to be aſhamed, than to boaſt, of ſuch converts. For what can be a ſtronger preſumption of the falſehood of a ſyſtem, than that it is the opiate of a reſtleſs conſcience; that it prevails with minds of a certain deſcription, not becauſe they find it true, but becauſe they feel it neceſſary; and that, in adopting it, they conſult leſs with their reaſon, than with their vices and

their fears? It requires but little ſagacity to foreſee that ſpeculations which originate in guilt, muſt end in ruin. Infidels are not themſelves ſatisfied with the truth of their ſyſtem; for had they any ſettled aſſurance of its principles, in conſequence of calm diſpaſſionate inveſtigation, they would never diſturb the quiet of the world by their attempts to proſelyte; but would lament their own infelicity in not being able to perceive ſufficient evidence for the truth of a religion, which furniſhes ſuch incentives to virtue, and inſpires ſuch exalted hopes. Having nothing to ſubſtitute in the place of religion, it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that, in oppoſition to the collective voice of every country, age, and time, proclaiming its neceſſity, ſolicitude for the welfare of mankind impels them to deſtroy it.

To very different motives muſt their conduct be imputed. More like conſpirators than philoſophers, in ſpite of the darkneſs with which they endeavor to ſurround themſelves, ſome rays of unwelcome conviction will penetrate, ſome ſecret apprehenſions that all is not right, will make themſelves felt, which they find nothing ſo effectual to quell as an attempt to enliſt freſh diſciples, who, in exchange for new principles, impart confidence, and diminiſh fear. For the ſame reaſon it is ſeldom they attack chriſtianity by argument: their favorite weapons are ridicule, obſcenity and blaſphemy; as the moſt miſerable outcaſts of ſociety are, of all men, found moſt to delight in vulgar merriment and ſenſeleſs riot.

Jesus Christ ſeems to have *his fan in his hand, and to be thoroughly purging his floor;* and nominal chriſtians will probably be ſcattered like chaff. But has *real* chriſtianity any thing to fear? Have not the degenerate manners, and corrupt lives of multitudes in the viſible church, been, on the contrary, the principal occaſion of ſcandal and offence? Infidelity, without intending it, is gradually removing the reproach; poſſeſſing

the property of attracting to itself the morbid humors which pervade the church, until the christian profession, on the one hand, is reduced to a sound and healthy state, and scepticism, on the other, exhibits nothing but a mass of putridity and disease.

In a view of the final issue of the contest, we should find little cause to lament the astonishing prevalence of infidelity, but for a solicitude for the rising generation; to whom its principles are recommended by two motives, with young minds the most persuasive, the love of independence, and the love of pleasure. With respect to the first, we would earnestly entreat the young to remember, that by the unanimous consent of all ages, modesty, docility, and reverence to superior years, and to parents, above all, have been considered as their *appropriate virtues*, a guard assigned by the immutable laws of God and nature on the inexperience of youth; and with respect to the second, that christianity prohibits no pleasures that are innocent, lays no restraints that are capricious; but that the sobriety and purity which it enjoins, by strengthening the intellectual powers, and preserving the faculties of mind and body in undiminished vigor, lay *the surest* foundation of present peace and future eminence. At such a season as this, it becomes an urgent duty on parents, guardians and tutors, to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of those committed to their care; to make it appear that a concern for their eternal welfare is their chief concern, and to imbue them early with that knowledge of the evidences of christianity, and that profound reverence for the scriptures, that with the blessing of God, (which with submission they may then expect) *may keep them from this hour of temptation that has come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.*

To an attentive observer of the signs of the times, it will appear one of the most extraordinary phenomena of this

eventful criſis, that amidſt the ravages of atheiſm and infidelity, real religion is evidently on the increaſe. *The kingdom of God*, we know, *cometh not with obſervation ;* but ſtill there are not wanting manifeſt tokens of its approach. The perſonal appearance of the Son of God was announced by the ſhaking of nations : his ſpiritual kingdom, in all probability, will be eſtabliſhed in the midſt of ſimilar convulſions and diſorders. The blaſphemous impiety of the enemies of God, as well as the zealous efforts of his ſincere worſhippers, will doubtleſs be overruled to accompliſh the purpoſes of his unerring providence : while, in inflicting the chaſtiſements of offended Deity on corrupt communities and nations, infidelity marks its progreſs by devaſtation and ruin, by the proſtration of thrones, and concuſſion of kingdoms ; thus appalling the inhabitants of the world, and compelling them to take refuge in the church of God, the true ſanctuary ; the ſtream of divine knowledge unobſerved is flowing in new channels, winding its courſe among humble vallies, refreſhing thirſty deſerts, and enriching, with far other and higher bleſſings than thoſe of commerce, the moſt diſtant climes and nations, until, agreeably to the prediction of prophecy, the *knowledge of the Lord ſhall fill and cover the whole earth.*

Within the limits of this diſcourſe, it would be impracticable to exhibit the evidences of Chriſtianity, nor is it my deſign ; but there is one conſideration reſulting immediately from my text, which is entitled to great weight with all who believe in the one living and true God, as the ſole object of worſhip. The Epheſians, in common with other Gentiles, are deſcribed in the text as being, previous to their converſion, *without God in the world ;* that is, without any juſt and ſolid acquaintance with his character, deſtitute of the knowledge of his will, the inſtitutes of his worſhip, and the hopes of his favor ; to the truth of which repreſentation whoever poſſeſſes the ſlighteſt acquaintance with pagan antiquity, muſt

assent ; nor is it a fact less inconteſtible, that, while human philoſophy was never able to aboliſh idolatry in a ſingle village, the promulgation of the goſpel overthrew it in a great part (and that the moſt enlightened) of the world. If the unity and perfections of God, together with his moral government and excluſive right to the worſhip of mankind, are truths, they cannot reaſonably be denied to be truths of the firſt importance, and infinitely to outweigh the greateſt diſcoveries in ſcience ; becauſe they turn the hopes, fears and intereſts of man into a totally different channel from that in which they muſt otherwiſe flow. Wherever theſe principles are firſt admitted, there a new dominion is erected, and a new ſyſtem of laws eſtabliſhed.

But, ſince all events are under divine direction, is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the great Parent, after ſuffering his creatures to continue for ages ignorant of his true character, ſhould, at length, in the courſe of his providence, fix upon falſehood, and that alone, as the effectual method of making himſelf known ; and that, what the virtuous exerciſe of reaſon in the beſt and wiſeſt men was never permitted to accompliſh, he ſhould confer on fraud and deluſion the honor of effecting ? It ill comports with the majeſty of truth, or the character of God, to believe he has built the nobleſt ſuperſtructure on the weakeſt foundation, or reduced mankind to the miſerable alternative, either of remaining deſtitute of the knowledge of himſelf, or of deriving it from the polluted ſource of impious impoſture. We therefore feel ourſelves juſtified, on this occaſion, in adopting the triumphant boaſt of the great apoſtle : *Where is the wiſe, where is the ſcribe, where is the diſputer of this world ? hath not God made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world ? for after that, in the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.*

FINIS.

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